

## OBITUARY



The Rev. Thomas Borgmeier, O.F.M.  
1892-1975

Thomas Borgmeier was born in Bielefeld, Westphalia, Germany on 31 October 1892 and died in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on 11 May 1975. In the more than 82 years between these dates Father Borgmeier lived a full life devoted to religious activities, editorial and publishing work, and entomology. Members of the Entomological Society of Washington have many reasons to pause and pay tribute to this great man and distinguished entomologist.

After graduation with distinction in the program of classics and humanities in the "gymnasium" in Bielefeld, Thomas went to Brazil in 1910 to join the Franciscan Order of Friars Minor in January 1911. He studied philosophy in Curitiba from 1912-1914 and theology in Petropolis from 1915-1918. While a student in Petropolis, Brother Thomas became interested in entomology while observing the habits of ants. Spending his

vacations in Blumenau, Santa Catarina, in 1917 he met and befriended Professor Hermann von Jhering who had founded the Museu Paulista in São Paulo. Through the generosity of a wealthy industrialist in Rio, Thomas was able to acquire von Jhering's large reprint library on ants as well as a fine binocular microscope. While studying ants in Petropolis, Thomas discovered phorid flies attacking and parasitizing them. Puzzled, he contacted another young entomologist, the Jesuit Father Hermann Schmitz, who as a disciple of the famous E. Wassmann, was well qualified to introduce him to the intricacies of the taxonomy and biology of the Phoridae. Borgmeier's first scientific publication, on the biology of the ant *Odontomachus affinis* Guérin, appeared in 1920, and in 1922 he described his first new species, the phorid *Dohniphora brasiliensis*.

Father Thomas was ordained a priest in May 1918, and from 1920-1924 was Professor of Biblical Sciences at the Major Seminary in Petropolis. At the same time he contributed freely to the monthly cultural magazine "Vozes de Petropolis" which was published by the friars. He quickly mastered the Portuguese language and translated a number of religious classics into that language. In 1922 Borgmeier began a friendship with Dr. Arthur Neiva who obtained from the Franciscans his complete freedom for entomology and his entrance into public service. In 1923 Thomas became an adjunct research scientist in the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro and in 1924 he moved definitively to the Museum. In 1927 he obtained his Brazilian citizenship and in 1928 went to São Paulo as assistant in entomology under Neiva in the newly founded Instituto Biologico. In 1933 he returned to Rio to become head of the entomological section of the Instituto de Biologia Vegetal in the Botanical Garden, where he remained for eight years.

In 1931 Father Borgmeier founded the international journal, *Revista de Entomologia*, which he edited and published until 1951 (when adverse financial circumstances ended its publication). He then started the publication of entomological monographs in the series "Studia Entomologica," which with the support of the Conselho Nacional de Pesquisas became a journal in 1958 and is now (1976) in its 19th volume. In 1940 the Franciscans elected Father Thomas to the provincial government as one of the four counsellors, and at the same time he was made director of their publishing house "Vozes." His administrative duties as head of this large publishing company took much time and his taxonomic studies suffered until he retired from "Vozes" and moved to Jacarepagua in 1952 at the age of 60 years.

Living practically in seclusion, with only nominal duties as chaplain for the Catholic institution for blind women in Jacarepagua that he had founded in 1947, Father Borgmeier devoted the ensuing 20 years of his life to full-

time systematic entomology. He closed his work on the army ants in 1955 with the publication of his monograph of the Ecitonini of the Neotropical Region (*Studia Ent.* 1:1-717) and turned his ant collection over to W. W. Kempf. He then plunged into a comprehensive taxonomic study of phorid flies, resulting in revisions of the Neotropical species (1958-1969, about 800 pp.), North American species (1963-1965, 575 pp.), Indo-Australian species (1966-1967, about 400 pp.), and a catalog of the Phoridae of the world (1968, 367 pp.). During his lifetime, Father Thomas published 243 papers in entomology and related subjects, totaling over 5,000 pages, and described more than 1,000 new species of phorid flies, about 100 species of ants, and a number of myrmecophilous beetles. His fine private collections of phorids and myrmecophilous beetles are now in the Museum of Zoology, Universidade de São Paulo, and his collection of Neotropical Formicidae is now in the hands of W. W. Kempf.

From 1959-1965, Father Borgmeier studied nearly 10,000 specimens of Phoridae from the United States National Museum of Natural History in Washington from which he determined about 500 species in 40 genera. Holotypes of 125 new species were deposited in the USNM collections. In 1965 the Smithsonian was able to purchase for a nominal sum from Father Borgmeier several hundred additional Neotropical phorids, mostly paratypes including more than 200 species not previously represented in the museum. During two extensive visits to Washington in 1961 and 1964 Father Thomas made many close personal friendships which included a number of members of the Entomological Society of Washington.

Thomas Borgmeier received many honors during his lifetime, all of which he accepted modestly and thankfully, as was his nature. He was the Brazilian delegate to the 5th International Congress of Entomology in Paris in 1932. He was awarded an honorary degree of Doctor of Science from St. Bonaventure University in New York in 1945. In 1955 he was elected as titular member of the Brazilian Academy of Science, and in 1962 he was the first recipient of the Costa Lima prize, instituted by the Seabra family and administered by the Academy. He was elected as a fellow of the Brazilian National Research Council in 1958 with the office of Pesquisador-Chefe. The Franciscan Order in 1965 conferred on him the honorary degree of Lector Generalis Jubilatus of the Order.

Thomas Borgmeier was a great man in the true sense of the word. We have listed here some of his innumerable tangible accomplishments. But his greatness probably lies even more in his intangible influence on his colleagues, friends, and students in the fields of entomology, education, religion, and publications, in each of which he was a recognized leader. Through personal dedication and with great sacrifice of time, effort, and money he almost singlehandedly kept two important entomological journals

going for more than 40 years. Numerous distinguished Brazilian entomologists began as his students. Those of us who had the privilege of his guidance and his friendship join in tribute *in memoriam*.

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